

My gal don' wear button-up shoes,  
Her feet too big for gaiters,  
All she's fit fur—a dip of snuff  
And a yallow yam potato.

Jint ahead, center back,

Did you ever work on the railroad  
track?

Sometimes a simple conversation, straight out of speech, makes the song; sometimes a thought or feeling discovers itself sung, almost without the decision to sing:

Pay day, pay day, oh pay day,

Pay day at Coal Creek tomorrow,

Pay day at Coal Creek tomorrow.

And this miraculously beautiful "holler":

Little boy, little boy, who fooled you  
here?

Little boy, little boy, who fooled you  
here?

Did they tell you it was a heaven?

You found a burning hell.

The one called *Mamma, Mamma, Make me a Garment* has the most astounding recitative quality, with a style of interval-leaping which sounds to a trained ear at first slightly amateurish or puzzling, but which on repetition yields a wild fresh juice. This is what we have all been talking about, when we said that the "folk art" must stimulate and fertilize the "fine art."

I think I understand better (now that

I have been through this collection) the humility with which such true stuff should be approached. Perhaps I will be permitted the thought that the "fine art" composer need not go completely overboard, to the degree that he wants to stop writing music. And since this note of mild complaint has already crept in, I should also like to make out a quick last-minute case for *town* folklore, not as against, but as supplementary to *rural* folklore; the gutter, the honkytonk, and even the boulevards sometimes give out with a musical richness quite up to the level of the farmers' and miners' and cowboys' inspirations. I am directing this at the reader, not at the Lomaxes. They have included (together with the songs of lumberjacks and teamsters, railroaders and hobos, Negro gangs, outlaws, holiness people, and ordinary lovers) a dozen-and-a-half "Hollers and Blues;" most of them new, all of them from deep inside the people. When Ozella Jones sings from the State Penitentiary at Raiford, Florida:

Now I'm so sorry, even the day I was  
born,

Now I'm so sorry, even the day I was  
born,

I want to say to all you bad fellas that  
you are in the wrong,

this composer confesses himself utterly  
sent.

Marc Blitzstein

## THE APPROACH TO "GREATNESS"

THIS book assuredly is a busman's holiday: Alfred Einstein, eminent scholar and sensitive critic of music, has taken time off to write a book about music. A light book, he tells us, a relaxation and one which, unlike the large and

scientific treatise on the Italian Madrigal he had just completed, would be written quickly and without much preliminary research. It is scarcely necessary for him to have added that the book would nevertheless be "the result of considerable

experience and long preoccupation with the great masters."

It is a book of random thoughts, many of which are delightful and astute and some of which are profound: thoughts which no doubt have floated through the author's mind and through his critical writings these many years. It is in the correlation of these ideas with each other and with the idea of the book – *Greatness in Music* – (Oxford Press, 1941) that the author, to my mind, has not succeeded. For, with myriads and myriads of facts presented, Einstein seems often to point the way to nothing clear. Profusion and confusion seem frequently to reign.

That the book does not hang together is perhaps inevitable. For greatness does not allow itself to be tabulated. It is the Germans who say: "Er ist ein Genie." The French, more wisely, put it: "Il a du génie." And perhaps it is so of greatness too. One should, perhaps, be content to say that a work, or a man, "partakes of greatness" and let it go at that. In any event there is the danger in dealing with abstractions, that in being too specific our concept may crumble between our fingers. And the division of the book into its several chapters—Questionable Greatness, Unquestionable Greatness, Esoteric Conditions for Greatness and Historical Conditions for Greatness – seems only to make more clear the underlying confusion of thought.

But perhaps I am taking all of this too seriously. I have the feeling that the inner Einstein wished merely to put down some of his excellent ideas about music; but that a moral force, or a being outside himself persuaded him that he must line them up in phalanxes. There are such interesting tid-bits, such fine

observations in the book, such a fundamental soundness in its approach.

There are wise and interesting observations on Gluck; and on Mendelssohn and Berlioz who "detested each other, although they went for joint walking tours in the Roman Campagna." On Debussy and Bizet; of the latter he says: "in smaller format he is the happiest and most delightful example of the perfect balance of talents: harmony, rhythm and melody . . . and some fine flashes of polyphonic imagination." There is an illuminating quotation from a letter in which Liszt's beloved and friend, Princess Carolyné Sayn-Wittgenstein, reproaches him for leaving the instrumentation of his orchestral works to various assistants. "Why on earth do you entrust Raff with the orchestration of your *Goethe-March*? What painter would be satisfied to deliver his pencil sketch and leave the coloring to a paint mixer?"

And the following: "Rhetoric – that's it. Rhetoric is not permitted in music. Liszt has used Bach for rhetorical purposes; but between rhetoric and expression there is an unbridgeable gap. To appreciate the difference one need only compare Liszt's *B-minor Sonata* with a sonata of Beethoven's, such as the *Appassionata* or the *C-minor Sonata*, Opus 111." He adds later: "However, genuine expression is not incompatible with virtuosity. Chopin's music has great virtuoso qualities but it is rarely rhetorical." Still later: "There were, in the course of the centuries, two great masters who liked to preserve the character, or the illusion, of improvisation, while in reality they calculated and determined even the smallest *fioriture*, namely Frescobaldi in the seventeenth and Chopin in the nineteenth century. Frescobaldi's solicitude

is doubly astonishing for a period which saw in fantastic improvisations the apex of the virtuoso's art. With Chopin the illusion of improvisation is part of the fragrance of his art, so impassioned and tender . . . Chopin had learned at the Grand Opera, in Rossini and Bellini and Meyerbeer, what sort of *fioritura* brings out the applause, and he wanted to avoid that kind."

There are illuminating thoughts on originality in music, on predestination in the life span of the great composers; on music as a counter-expression of the spirit of the times. In regard to the latter Einstein speaks of the "sedative qualities" of the music of the sixteenth century: "a gift from heaven which lifts up the soul, purifies, comforts and pacifies the hearts of men." He reminds us that this was the century of religious schism, the century of the sack of Rome, of Saint Bartholomew's Night and "a never ending sequence of wars and epidemics." He continues: "Are the *Ring of the Nibelungen*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Parsifal* . . . affirmations of the nineteenth century? *Parsifal* . . . the flight from sensuality . . . the teachings of Saint Francis . . . exhibited before the belated, tired, industrialized, newspaper-reading citizens of

the nineteenth century!" Not all art is a counter-expression of the times in which it is produced; but enough to give the lie to those who assert, as so many in America do today, that art must necessarily express only the immediate: the now and the here.

Perhaps the most striking passages are those which deal with the "happy and the unhappy periods" in the history of music; the winged but well chosen words with which he speaks of the Mozart piano concertos and of the Schubert songs; the comparison between the seventeenth century and our own. With his ideas on this latter one need not agree: the composer, who mostly sees the horizon as bright and clear and beckoning – for otherwise he would be no composer – cannot be expected here to see eye to eye with the critic. But like much else in the book, this too is provocative and striking: the product of a sensitive, astute and learned musician.

Well translated, of course, by César Saerchinger, the book nevertheless contains a few mistakes and one (to me) wholly inexplicable passage about Wagner and Debussy.

*Frederick Jacobi*

## QUICK-SKETCH OF SPAIN

**F**EW people realize how strong has been the Spanish influence on the course of musical history, especially during the crucial years around 1600 and 1900. In *The Music of Spain* (W.W. Norton and Company), Gilbert Chase throws some much needed light on the subject. He points out that, unfortunately for the glory of Spanish tradition,

some of the greatest Spaniards have labored in Italy where their names were Italianized, while many of the greatest composers who worked in Spain were Italians whose names never were "Spanish-ized," hence the general underestimation of Hispanic influence.

Though the author sets out to give us "not so much a history of Spanish